



The 'think tanking' of Maine and America

By Raymond Ludwig | Feb 20, 2012

Our Maine state government and its people are experiencing, for the first time, the overwhelming power of an extreme right wing movement in this country. This is not your usual fiscal difference between Republicans and Democrats; instead, it has more insidious aspects, driven by an ideology that has already affected our national government and is now affecting the governing of Maine. This has happened because of the efforts of a think tank called the Heritage Foundation.

Think tanks are not new in the United States; in fact they have been prevalent for nearly as many years as the country is old. Yet, most Americans, being not particularly concerned of what goes on in the upper echelons of the political spectrum, are unaware of them. In this country there are approximately 30 think tanks. They are all supposed to be nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations, whose purpose is to analyze ongoing political issues and how they are likely to affect governance, democracy and people's rights. Their findings are eventually and subsequently published, displaying positions that will be determined usually by their particular political predisposition. The amount of their published findings is absolutely mind boggling. It's little wonder that average Americans actually pay much attention to them.

The Brookings Institute, Heritage Foundation and Cato Institute are the three most influential think tanks in this country. However, a significant aspect of the Brookings Institute, Cato Institute and most other think tanks is that while being prolific in publishing their findings, they do not explicitly try to impose beliefs on our democracy. On the other hand, it seems the Heritage Foundation was founded with that purpose in mind.

The Heritage Foundation was founded in 1973 by Paul Weyrich, Edwin Feulner and Joseph Coors for promoting conservative ideas affecting foreign policy. Its purpose quickly shifted to conservative domestic policy at the beginning of the Reagan

Administration in 1981. Today, Heritage Foundation policy is driving the Republican Party agenda and presenting a nationally organized effort of influencing the running of our country.

The Heritage Foundation's movement, for people who even know it exists, is difficult to understand. Its dialog is couched in patriotic terminology but in truth, is often laced with lies and misinformation. Its message can be severe and volatile, founded on a sort of broad-reaching fundamentalism in order to promote the extremes of capitalism and to diminish social ideals necessary to support a democracy. To give it a name, some call it neo-conservatism. Maybe it should be more appropriately called neo-colonialism, by which a great power of few people is used to indirectly maintain or extend influence over all other people concerning economic and political policies.

Paul LePage, our governor, is closely allied with the Heritage Foundation. In Maine, the Heritage Foundation is called the Maine Heritage Foundation or the Heritage Policy Center, ostensibly for the purpose of giving it a legitimate image.

LePage is a strong supporter of the Heritage Foundation's mindset, a fact proven by many of his appointees and close associates, who are actual members of the Heritage Foundation. The Governor, upon assuming office, wasted little time in implementing Heritage Foundation type policies by reducing the effectiveness of the Department of Labor (this was accomplished by merging it with the Department of Commerce) and by removing the murals depicting the history of the labor movement from the walls of that office. Those actions, among others, such as proposing legislation that negatively affected labor unions, state workers, teachers and the state pension system were deliberate attacks on the middle class. It is from these types of actions, we can only assume, that the intent of the Heritage Foundation and LePage is to gradually introduce and implement policies that take away democratic rights for working people.

The Heritage Foundation is a conservative political organization masquerading as a legitimate policy making think tank. It has unlimited funds and resources and has purposely positioned itself into our Maine government, with its paid employees, to impose its beliefs and brand of government on the people. The reason for this imposition is to serve the convoluted system of oligarchies that presently run the country, which has also resulted from efforts by the Heritage Foundation at the national level.

Now that the LePage administration has been in power for a year, it is becoming clear to people paying attention, that the Heritage Foundation is calling all the shots. The governor does nothing without direction from the foundation with the possible exception of shooting off his mouth. His capital for a day meetings is a design of the foundation and carefully scripted. His rhetoric, whether he knows it or not, is meant to be inflammatory, arouse the discontented among us and create wedges of divisiveness within the populace.

Another Heritage Foundation provocation is to unjustly attack established working state agencies. These attacks are unfounded, unnecessary and are ideologically driven. It is the foundation's intent of one party political control that is the root of this behavior. The

attack on the Maine Housing Authority is a perfect example. We are also presently watching the drama now unfolding around the devastating budget cuts to Maine Care as proposed by the governor and the Heritage Policy Center. What will be next?

In preparing this column, I had many casual discussions with approximately 100 Maine people. They all professed a love for the country and the state they live in but I found them distressingly unaware of the amount of anti-democratic profundity that is attacking their government. In all my discussions, the first question I asked was, "Have you ever heard of the Heritage Foundation?" Every answer was, "No."